

The symbolism of
fidessa, her saracen
partner, and her
fiance in the faerie
queen...



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Fidessa's character in Edmund Spenser's "The Fairy Queene", introduced in the second canto of book 1, is essential to the understanding of one of Spenser's main messages in the poem: the Roman Catholic Church is corrupt and falsely interprets Christianity. Through Fidessa's and her Saracen's names, Fidessa's characterization and dress, and the relaying of the death of Fidessa's fiance, the reader is able to fully realize and comprehend Spenser's position on the Roman Catholic Church. Fidessa is superficially characterized as the beautiful young daughter of a Roman emperor. At first glance, Fidessa appears to be the quintessential maiden of the chivalric knight tale. She is a beautiful lady (the knight cannot keep his eyes away from her face [26]) and she is also grandly arrayed (13). She is accompanied by her champion knight, who came into her life after the noble prince to whom she was betrothed died (23-24). With a father who is an emperor (22), Fidessa seems to be the paradigm of a sweet, gentle maiden in need of protection and assistance. However, by looking closely at how Fidessa is portrayed, one sees who Fidessa truly is and what she symbolizes. Fidessa's ornate, scarlet dress is reminiscent of "the purple clothed woman on the seven hills" found in the Book of Revelation in the Bible, a representation of false religion. The fact that Fidessa's father is a Roman emperor establishes the analogy of Fidessa as a representation of the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, Spenser equates Roman Catholicism with false religion. Spenser does not have a positive view of the Church (which makes sense, seeing as how Elizabeth was a Protestant queen). Spenser employs name symbolism throughout his work to convey what a character is intended to represent. The name Fidessa means "faith", suggesting that Fidessa is meant to represent faith. However, Fidessa's real name is Duessa, which means "two-faced", which informs the <https://assignbuster.com/the-symbolism-of-fidessa-her-saracen-partner-and-her-fiance-in-the-faerie-queene/>

reader that Fidessa has a dual nature and does not, in fact, represent faith. Similarly, the fact that Fidessa is accompanied by a Saracen named Sans foy, which means “ false faith” or “ without faith”, shows that Fidessa is a representation of false faith and false piety. Actually, the fact that her champion knight is a Saracen in the first place should strike the reader as odd and important, because it is ironic that a woman with a name that means faith has an “ infidel” for a companion. The reader will learn that Fidessa inspires disbelief, and, unlike Una, Fidessa is insincere. This fact is in keeping with the theme of separating the Redcrosse Knight from the truth, set up by Archimago, who tricks the Redcrosse Knight into thinking that Una is immoral, which causes him to abandon his quest. The main way in which Spenser presents his views on the Roman Catholic Church is through the death of Fidessa’s fiance. Fidessa’s fiance is an emblematic representation of Jesus Christ – a “ faithful”, “ meeke”, and “ debonaire” man (23). This Christ-figure undergoes an “ innocent death” and his body is mysteriously removed (24). Fidessa spent many years searching for the corpse of her fiance. Fidessa’s fiance represents Jesus Christ and Fidessa represents the Church, then, logically, Spenser is saying, through the fact that Fidessa (the Church) and her fiance (Jesus) can never be married, that Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of Christianity, has no place in the Church. There is no “ body” of Christ, because Christ ascended into heaven, He rose from the dead. Fidessa’s perpetual search for a body that, as any true Christian should know, does not exist symbolizes that the Roman Catholic Church has based its entire theology on a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of religious doctrine. Thus, the Church is invalid and erroneous as a religion. Fidessa is an essential character to Spenser’s “ The Faerie Queen” because her <https://assignbuster.com/the-symbolism-of-fidessa-her-saracen-partner-and-her-fiance-in-the-faerie-queene/>

portrayal allows Spenser to get across one of the main themes of his poem: the Roman Catholic Church is an erroneous, hypocritical institution. Spenser subtly intersperses his views within his allegorical tale so that the reader is able to enjoy the fanciful tale of a chivalric knight and his travels while she also is able to understand the views of the author, thus understanding the circumstances under which Spenser wrote.